

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS:

MARGARET CHARLTON AND THE EARLY DAYS OF THE
MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION *

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FIRST let me thank you for the honor you have conferred on me in electing me your president. I cannot boast that I have worked my way up to this position. In fact I began near the top of the ladder when you made me an honorary vice-president a few years ago, apparently on account of my enviable connection with Osler and his library. It was only when the Nominating Committee conceived the strange idea that there was presidential stuff in me that I finally succeeded in becoming a professional member and in being allowed to pay my annual dues.

From a bibliographical and antiquarian keeper of books you must not expect a helpful professional address, full of constructive suggestions, such as that of last year's president. For this effort of mine I take my cue from another predecessor, my good friend Dr. Walter Steiner. In his 1932 address he regretted that the *Bulletin* had published no memorial notice of Miss Charlton who played a major part in the beginnings of our Association. He commended this duty to some one who had known her well; so I shall try at this late date to fill the gap and pay the tribute which we surely owe to her memory, although my acquaintance with her was only that of reader with librarian, plus a special interest she took in me as a relative of Osler, one of her heroes.

A good colleague of ours whose digestion seems to be impaired by silent standing toasts to the dead, and who failed to enjoy our fascinating pictorial visit to the morgue after last year's banquet, has objected that this year, when we have only one death in the membership to report, it would be a pity to make the presidential address an obituary. Let me call it, rather, an appreciation of some of our founders, and if you are polite enough not to show signs of boredom with my treatment of this subject of perennial interest, I shall go on to say something of Gould and of Osler. Instead of the silent toast, you may greet the unseen, as Robert Browning requested and as our faithful friend Dr. Joseph Bloodgood would have preferred, with a cheer.

Many of the most flourishing institutions have obscure beginnings, and ours is no exception. There seems to be no contemporary record of the steps leading up to the organizing meeting, the minutes of which are extremely laconic. The earliest account I have found, though an all too brief one, is that by Dr. William Browning, of Brooklyn, in the *Bulletin* of July, 1919, when the Association celebrated its majority. All the original members were then alive, and several of them, Miss Charlton included, were present at that 21st anniversary meeting. Tonight we are fortunate to have

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two of them with us, Dr. John L. Rothrock, of St. Paul, and Miss Noyes. Dr. Rothrock, who retired a few years ago from the chair of gynecology and obstetrics in the University of Minnesota, has faithfully contributed time, money, and books to the Ramsey County Medical Society's Library, our this year's host. And, by the way, if anyone wants to know how to build up a medical library, let him read Dr. H. L. Taylor's brief history of this 35-year-old local example in *Minnesota Medicine*, 1931 (14: 906). Osler says that a library is usually the result of the enthusiasm of one or two men. Well, the late Dr. Eduard Boeckmann seems to have infected many of his colleagues with his own enthusiasm, while his methods, as rare as they were effective, were chiefly three: founding a medical journal, turning over to the library the profits of a catgut factory, and making week-end raids with an express wagon on doctors' bookshelves, lumber-rooms and attics! The good deeds of the other original member present this evening are well known to you all. If not, look through the files of the *Bulletin*, as I have done recently, and you will find that through many critical years of its growth Miss Noyes has been the strength and stay of the Association—she and her collaborator of the Maryland Faculty, the late Dr. John Ruhrah, that good Oslerian, a lover of books and men, and particularly children. His memory well deserves our affectionate homage.

There were eight who met in Dr. Gould's editorial sanctum at Philadelphia in 1898 to launch the Association, the others being Mr. Fisher, now the Nestor of our profession, Dr. E. H. Brigham, of the Boston Medical Library, Dr. Rothrock, Dr. Browning, Miss Charlton, Miss Noyes, and Miss Elisabeth Thies (now Mrs. Meyer), of Johns Hopkins. Osler, who could not be present, sent Miss "Thesis," as he called her, and Miss Noyes. He could not have been better represented. The respective share of each in the credit for the enterprise has never been determined, but there seems to be no doubt that Gould and Miss Charlton were the prime movers, the former being the promoter and the latter, very probably, the originator. While waiting for the history of the Association which Miss Noyes has promised to write, let me quote from the reminiscences she gave us at her meeting in Baltimore two years ago (*Bulletin*, 1934, 23: 33):

Miss Charlton was the one person who indirectly brought the Association into being from speaking with Dr. Osler. She had belonged to the American Library Association. Their problems were not our problems, and she felt lost and that the time was wasted, yet she had striven for contact with those doing just the sort of work she was doing. And so she suggested to Dr. Osler that it would be a fine thing if the Medical Libraries could do the same sort of thing the American Library Association was doing. Just how that contact came to Dr. Gould, whether by way of Dr. Osler or else from Miss Charlton direct, I do not know. You can think of that vivid personality of Dr. Osler as being back of it all, but it really took the dynamic force of Dr. Gould at that time to put it across. As a publisher and editor he knew absolutely tons of really good things that were being discarded and lost, and felt that the time was ripe for everyone to begin to conserve.

Besides the driving force, and a much needed donation of \$100, Gould contributed the backbone of the Association, the Exchange. With this, in fact, among his multifarious activities, he would seem to have already made a beginning. For in an editorial in his *Philadelphia Medical Journal*, 11

June, 1898 (1: 1071), soliciting support for the new Association of Medical Librarians (as we then were), he states that he himself had succeeded in one year in getting gifts of 1,921 books and 3,934 journals and in distributing them to needy libraries. He urged editors to send their publications gratis to all member-libraries and, in another editorial (p. 1170), he records a resolution of the American Medical Association adopting this suggestion. I wonder to what extent this pious example was followed, and for how long. Certainly in these cheese-paring days we have to pay for most periodicals, even those not "made in Germany," and I am not urging Mrs. Cunningham to forward the suggestion to Herr Springer or his *Nasti* oppressors of domestic Jews and foreign librarians.

Margaret Charlton was born on 10 December, 1858, at Laprairie, a village across the river near Montreal, and was the youngest of four sisters, one of whom, with two nieces, is still living in Montreal. Her father, Captain John Charlton, had been commissioned in the British Army and did good service with the loyal forces in the Canadian rebellion of 1837. She inherited refinement and strong family traditions. Christened Margaret Anne, she herself changed her second name to Ridley, partly as a mild literary disguise, and partly through pride in her father's collateral descent from the family of the famous Bishop Ridley, the Anglican martyr burned at Oxford in 1555, the man who on that day, in the prophecy of his fellow-sufferer, was to "light such a candle in England as, by the grace of God, shall never be put out." Educated almost entirely at home, she studied music and learned to play the piano well; but did not go to any school until she was 16, when she had two years at the Montreal High School, among the first girls to be admitted to that excellent institution which was already venerable in 1875.

She early developed a taste for literature, which some senior members of the Folk Lore Society encouraged her to cultivate, and she became something of a journalist and author. She worked on the *Dominion Illustrated*, a really excellent weekly, well edited, with interesting and well written articles. Apparently too good for its time and place, it lasted only from 1888 to 1894. In comparable periodicals of the present day the great improvement in the reproduction of pictures seems counterbalanced by literary sloppiness. I have not identified Miss Charlton's contributions; they were probably unsigned or pseudonymous. Her early work was romantic and imaginative, and she shares with a collaborator, Miss Charlotte Fraser, the distinction of having produced, in 1892, what was probably the first book of fairy tales to be published in Canada. This was called "A wonder web of fairy stories." Other books by "M. R. Charlton and C. A. Fraser" were "In the days of Sir Walter Raleigh," 1890, and "With printless foot," 1894. This last is a little quarto of 82 pages containing four pleasant, well told tales, charmingly illustrated, and with a preface beginning, "Realism is the unlovely harpy of our generation."

After the sudden death of her friend, which must have been a blow to her, she determined to become a librarian, and obtained her training at Amherst College, Mass., where a summer course was given in the early

'nineties. If she did not study under the famous Dewey at Albany, she seems to have returned to Montreal, about 1894, thoroughly imbued, perhaps I might say be-Dewied, with his classification. For a time she had charge of the library at the Y. M. C. A., where her good work earned her the appointment to McGill in 1895. Our Medical Library at that time was 72 years old and the largest one in America connected with a school. It contained about 14,000 volumes, classified and catalogued very imperfectly, if at all. During her 19 years of service about 10,000 volumes were added. She worked with devotion and enthusiasm at her Herculean task, but considering that throughout most of this period she had no skilled help, it would be surprising if she had ever succeeded entirely in reducing all the chaos to order.

Soon after she came to McGill there was a notable combined meeting of the British and Canadian Medical Associations at Montreal in 1897. Osler was present, but apparently Gould was not. Whoever originated the idea of our Medical Library Association, it has been plausibly surmised that the subject was first broached at this meeting. Gould, in our early days, seems to have been too busy to work out details; the treasurer after two years resigned in despair; Margaret Charlton was our first secretary, and though her contemporaries sometimes found her vague in her decisions and purposes, it was she who contributed the vision and the enthusiasm which, backed by the support from Baltimore, nursed our Association through the critical years of its infancy.

To lose a job to which one has devoted head, heart, hand and twenty of one's best years must be one of the major tragedies of life. Each of us is his own worst enemy, and if Miss Charlton was a hero-worshipper, her aversions were equally strong and not always so reasonable. Her principles, I think, were uncompromisingly rigid. For years she had worked happily under a chief, the Honorary Librarian, a member of the faculty, one who is an extraordinarily angelic combination of wisdom, courtesy, patience and good humor. In other words, she had been largely her own master. In 1913 he was succeeded by a new broom which raised a lot of dust. After a year of intolerable friction her new chief drew up a program which she would not, or felt she could not, carry out. The irresistible force met an immovable spirit in a not unremovable body, and in May, 1914, she resigned. A bitter sense of injustice prevented her ever revisiting her old haunts, and 15 years later I could not induce her to come, openly or surreptitiously, to see the newly arrived Osler Library which would have interested her intensely.

My most vivid recollections of her are connected with Osler's frequent gifts to the library. These would always be brought out to show me, and I can see her now, affectionately stroking a nice old binding, turning the leaves, and discovering more wonders and beauties in it than my dull eye could clearly see. She would purr over it in her richly modulated voice which, when rhapsodizing, had a remarkably rippling and caressing cadence. She was always ready to talk about Dr. Osler, too ready according to one of his pupils who, for that reason, often had me take out books for him. An-

other habitually made use of me for the same purpose but for a different reason. This was a sensitive, book-devouring investigator who was disliked by and positively afraid of our mild librarian! For though there was always a quiet dignity about Miss Charlton, it did not conceal her fervid likes and dislikes. Among her many good qualifications, she was extraordinarily successful as a beggar, and not only in getting second-hand donations; she could even worm the new and expensive book out of the unsympathetic publisher or the remote and impecunious author.

About the time of the McGill unpleasantness, she suffered the additional misfortune of losing her mother. Always a devoted, home-loving daughter, this loss perhaps made possible her exile from Montreal. She was too good a librarian to remain long unemployed and for the next eight years, from October, 1914, to May, 1922, she had charge of the library of the Academy of Medicine, Toronto. There she worked with the same enthusiastic earnestness and to everyone's satisfaction. She increased their collection from 6,500 to 12,000 volumes, classified it according to Dewey (I reverence anyone who can do that to modern medical books!), and had it almost completely catalogued when she felt it was time to retire and return to her sisters in Montreal. In the train on the journey home she met with a strange and painful accident. A heavy electric globe, insecurely fastened, fell on her head. The effects of this she felt until she died, 9 years later, on May 1st, 1931, at the good age of 72.

It is interesting to note that by the end of last century, in Canada at least, librarianship as a calling for women had not penetrated the official mind. In "Women of Canada, their life and work," a book compiled for distribution at the Paris Exhibition in 1900, there are no librarians, but Margaret Ridley Charlton is entered twice, first as a journalist, and secondly, for her fairy tales, under "Fiction." After she found her vocation she would seem to have published nothing for some years, unless there are library papers by her in our early official journals which I have not discovered; but she continued to cultivate her hobby, and switched from the elfin to the historical. Under the pseudonym, Lynn Hetherington, taken from the name of an ancestral mansion in the North of England, she contributed four interesting articles between 1909 and 1913 to the *University Magazine*, an undeservedly defunct quarterly of which we used to be justly proud. The first of these, entitled "Tecumseh," is written in a rather heroic style and I would hesitate to commend it to you patriotic children of the Revolution, for this really noble red man with his dream of an Indian confederation has all the virtues, while his American enemies are painted a uniform "yellow." Her three other articles are on the famous Beaver Club of the fur traders, 1785-1824, to which no one was eligible till he had survived a winter in the wilds; on Father Lacombe, the contemporary veteran missionary to the Indians; and on Mrs. Simcoe, wife of the first governor of Ontario. For her later work she drew her inspiration from Canadian medical history, and wrote on Louis Hébert, Quebec's first surgeon and first farmer, in both of which callings he was very proficient. This paper appeared in the Johns Hopkins *Bulletin* in 1914. After a long

and busy interval she published a sort of companion study of Ontario's pioneer physician, Christopher Widmer, this time in the *Annals of Medical History*, 1922. Finally came her *magnum opus*, "Outlines of the history of medicine in Lower Canada," which runs through four numbers in two volumes of the *Annals*, 1923-4, and fills 98 of its large pages. In book form, with an index, this would have been more useful and would have had a wider distribution, at any rate in her own country, before it was superseded by recent books on the subject. It was only to these medicated writings that she signed her real name, and then only in its shortest and genderless form, "M. Charlton." I wonder if this was in deference to the traditional Victorian prejudice against women writers. All her historical studies give evidence of painstaking research and contribute something new. They are well worth reading.

So much to the memory of Margaret Charlton, to whom this Medical Library Association is the best sort of a monument. May it endure.

I began my remarks with Osler; let me end them with him. A few years ago I distributed several hundred copies of his later reprints through our Exchange. There are more copies of most of those items for any who desire them. One of those reprints has on its cover the following words, which may have puzzled you as they did me when I first noticed them: "*Proceedings of the Medical Library Association*, 1909, Vol. 1, Part 2." It is entitled, "The medical library in post-graduate work," Osler's presidential address "at the inaugural meeting" at Belfast, July 28th, and is reprinted from the *B. M. J.* (1909, ii: 925-8), but is paged 9 to 19. This mysterious pagination was explained when I found an 8-page pamphlet, called part 1 of the "Proceedings," printed at Manchester the same year and containing the constitution (based on ours) of this M. L. A. "of Great Britain and Ireland," a list of 32 members, and a report of the first annual meeting. An editorial in the *B. M. J.*, 1910 (ii: 641), gives an account of an interesting second meeting, and the rest is silence. Apparently the general Library Association over there, established in 1877 soon after its American prototype, had too strong a hold on our British confrères. Of all the societies which Osler helped to launch, most of them flourishing like us, this godchild of his and ours was the only one, as far as I know, that failed to survive its second birthday.

Osler's address gives a sort of survey of the medical libraries of the Old Country, with a masterly analysis of medical men as readers, a plea for hobbies in general and bookish ones in particular, and a characteristic paragraph on the Mayo brothers and what self-education and post-graduate study had already done for them; and he ends with a good motto which he borrowed from the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, not from us, but the practice of which has carried our Association thus far and should tide us over any future difficulties: *Non sibi sed toti*—unselfishly for the good of all.